

EXPOSURES

Exposures: Aneta Bartos

The photographer's new series, a vision of the man she calls Dad, is a perfect showcase for her grim desires and fairy-tale romanticism.

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Aneta Bartos identifies as a ferocious 83-year-old Polish immigrant still hustling in Canarsie, Brooklyn. Of course, the art photographer now lives and works in Manhattan, where she seems awfully languorous for a hustler, and she isn't really older than her father, who, at 68, asked her to take a couple good photos of his body before he hit 70. The filial collaboration that followed is a perfect showcase for the grim desire and fairy-tale romanticism we can't get enough of in her work. Bartos has a quiet, cultish following: her photographs may remind you of Duane Michals's Polaroids, tender with the fruits of domestic surveillance, or Miroslav Tichy's pinhole candid, his accidental exhibitionists half-showing up in the furred light, or Deborah Turbeville's smoky, mirrored fashion shoots, minus the clothes. We fell in love with Bartos when she shot [Boys](#) in 2011, a series of sweet-limbed pale nudes, many of her boyfriend, that glimmered hotly through a bottle-green gloom. If you looked closely, you could see that each figure was somewhere in the process of jerking off.

When did you first start taking photographs?

Aneta Bartos: I first took a class in high school, and although—or maybe because—I spoke no English, having emigrated from Poland at 16, it was easy to feel I had an instinct for composing and capturing images. Photography felt natural to me. However, until my second year of college, it was only a hobby.

Tell us about this project called *Dad*.

AB: Ever since I was a little girl, my dad was involved in bodybuilding—training teams, performing for audiences, all those kinds of things. Anywhere I went with him, there was a bit of a spectacle. He was really a high school history teacher! But he loved showing off his physique. In [this project](#), which started when he asked me to take photos of him before he turned 70, my aim is to recreate my childhood memories of my dad. His presence takes me back to my youth—to what felt like an endless stretch of days in a pastoral landscape. His love was the sun.

What kind of camera do you use, and why?

AB: Speed Graflex, Kodak Instamatic, Different Polaroid Cameras. I mostly use expired Polaroid film, which to me possesses the perfect dreamlike quality of the world I am trying to create—a distilled but still murky mix of beauty, eros and fear.

I love the little anecdote you gave in [Secret Behavior](#) about growing up with nudity. It's comforting somehow. A little unlike you, though I also grew up in a Catholic household, I remember things like watching *Titanic* with my parents and blushing when Leo paints Kate.

AB: I didn't grow up in a nudist camp, but my parents certainly had a healthier attitude toward bodies than most people did. My community outside of my household was probably similar to yours, which was a bit confusing. I remember being uncomfortable with my body changing in my early teens. I was extremely conscious of anyone noticing or commenting on, for example, my developing breasts. It was an early sign of sexuality, which was taught in school and church as something dirty and sinful. As you get older and develop an independent mind, you try to take a more personal approach to the politics of gender, the sexuality of bodies, and bodies themselves.

I don't consider my dad wearing speedos in the house and my mom sun bathing topless in the garden during the summer as nudity, but this level of body comfort in my house is certainly the reason why my dad and I have no issues collaborating on my *Dad* series. Ever since college, I have been intrigued by human bodies as spiritual, magical and mysterious energy. This has become my journey into the psyche of the body, where my passions and taboos find their home.

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The most challenging project for me was probably the [4 Sale collaboration](#). I explored the roles of exhibitionist and a voyeur as well as exploring female sexuality with three other females—using each other's bodies. Being a voyeur, I felt right at home, whereas becoming an exhibitionist and posing nude for the other artists made me anxious, uncomfortable, and almost frightened.

From a story of yours in *Elephant*, I loved this quote: “My aim was to generate a self-sufficient, sexually and dangerously charged world of females, completely independent of men and their gaze.” It sounds like a great plot line of a movie yet to be made.

AB: I feel that the plot of this movie, metaphorically speaking, has been rolling for quite some time now. It's becoming more apparent and visible that women artists own the gaze and don't portray themselves as weak or submissive.

Even when I put myself in front of my lens, I am the gazer. The women in most of my projects are full of sexuality, darkly flirtatious and alive. They start to invite you into their world, each time a little closer, only to make you aware of their strength and supremacy.

What do you find pleasure in?

AB: Nature, exploring unknown territory, and freedom.